

DIN DAYALU SHARMA : THE FORMATIVE PHASE OF THE SANATANA DHARMA MOVEMENT IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY NORTH INDIA

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According to the well-known *Dictionary of Hinduism* by Benjamin Walker, *Sanatanism*, means 'ancientness', a term signifying the sacred and unique quality of something that has come down from immemorial antiquity, something that has in fact always been and therefore, beyond human jurisdiction.¹ Dharma essentially is right action whose content may not be the same everywhere or in all times.² The content or meaning of Sanatana Dharma however have actually been evolving and expanding over time.

Sanatana Dharma as a movement is a well known socio-religious phenomenon of the late nineteenth century north India. It emerged in the central Punjab and western United Provinces mainly in response to the relatively recent inclusion of the region in the British Indian empire and in reaction to the aggressive proselytising activity of the Christian missionaries in this area.

Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma (1863-1937) is one of the best known protagonists of the Sanatana Dharma as a movement for cultural adjustment and reform in a socio-political environment which was shaped equally by a reaction to the somewhat radical ideology and programme of the Arya Samaj. This paper attempts to reconstruct the formative phase of the Sanatana Dharma movement which has so far not received scholarly attention.

I

As evident from the available information about his early life, Din Dayalu belonged to the emergent middle class in British province of the Punjab. He was born in May 1863 in the town of Jhajjar, which is now a sub-division in the district of Rohtak now in Haryana. His ancestor, Pandit Maharam, had moved with his family from Bahadurgarh to Jhajjar. Din Dayalu's father Pandit Ganga Sahai, a scholar of Persian, died at the age of twenty one. Din Dayalu's mother, who was a devotee of Lord Krishna, belonged to an influential family from Patauda village near Jhajjar. Members of her family held important posts in the police department. Her brother

Pandit Kalyan Singh had been the Kotwal of Delhi. Din Dayalu started his education at the age of five at a *maktab* where he studied Urdu and Persian from a Maulvi. He went to live with his uncle Chandrabhanu, who was a police-officer at Hasangarh, and joined a *madarssa* and started studying English. On his return to Jhajjar he joined a government school from where he passed his middle examination. Din Dayalu probably had a little knowledge of elementary English but was reasonably well versed in Urdu and Persian, having studied Sadi and Rumi. At the age of eighteen Din Dayalu was married to Anar Devi, the daughter of a Gaur Brahmin, Pandit Rambaksh Tiwari of Nanu village near Riwadi. This put a stop to his education and he took up a job in Hoshiarpur as a superintendent in the census of 1881 for a year. In 1883, he again joined government service in the revenue office in the pargana of Kosli but left it within a year.³ After this there is no record of Din Dayal ever taking up any kind of service.

In 1882, between the two jobs, Din Dayalu founded his first Hindu association, the *Panchayat-i-Taraqqi-i-Hanud* (Council for the advancement of Hindus). It is the first known effort of Din Dayalu in the field of social service. It is said that in 1883 the society's name was changed to the *Society Rifah-i-Am* in an attempt to include Muslims for the overall progress of the nation. The president of this society was Maulvi Ghulam Muhammad, a Tehsildar, and a pensioner. This society published a monthly paper, *Hariyana* which was edited by Din Dayalu himself. Its manager and publisher was Maulvi Ghulam Ahmad Biriya, who was the son of the president of the society. Din Dayalu wrote impressive essays and poems for the *Hariyana*, along with other Urdu papers like *Awadh Akhbar* from Lucknow and *Akhbar Chunar* from Chunargarh. Within a year, however, Din Dayalu broke all relations with the society because he objected to certain words used for Sita in an essay written by Ghulam Ahmad Biriya for the *Hariyana*.⁴

In 1883 an important event changed the tenor of Din Dayalu's life. He witnessed *Ras Lila* being performed in Kosli by the *Ras Mandali* which had come from Mathura. The *Ras Lila* left a deep impression on his mind. In the same year he went on a tour to Mathura and visited various places in Brij. Here he met Swami Narayan who was a *Vaishnav* sadhu and a devotee of Lord Krishna. He had written two poetical *granth*s, *Brij Vihar* and *Anurag Ras* in *Brij Bhasa* and another work, *Lilanukaran*. He maintained that *Krishan* could be worshipped by watching his *lilas*. Din Dayalu became his disciple and with his permission went to Mathura to study Sanskrit Grammar

from Pandit Uday Prakash Dev Sharma who had studied Sanskrit Grammar from Swami Virijanand along with Swami Dayanand Saraswati.⁵ Within two years Din Dayalu became proficient in Sanskrit, Hindi, Grammar, Advait Vedanta and Vaishnav principles of Bhakti and thereafter came to be called Pandit in place of Munshi.

Defence of Hinduism now became Din Dayalu's main preoccupation. In 1885 he started a weekly Urdu paper in Mathura entitled, *Mathura Akhbar*, dedicated to defending Hindu religious principles. This paper had a readership in the Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh, but lasted less than a year. In the same year, on the request of Munshi Gauri Shankar Sahai, head of the Kayastha Sabha, Aligarh, Din Dayalu went to Gurdaspur to prevent a converted Christian youth Devi Prasad from marrying a Christian girl. Din Dayalu delivered lectures and held debates with missionaries at Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Lahore. However, it is not known whether he was successful in preventing this marriage and reconverting the Kayastha youth. By this time, Munshi Harsukh Rai of the Kayastha Sabha had become his close friend, and he persuaded Din Dayalu to accept the editorship of the Urdu newspaper *Kohinoor* of Lahore. On his tours Din Dayalu met elites and members of royalty among Hindus. He visited Kapurthala on the occasion of the marriage of the Maharaja. Here he made acquaintance with Diwan Ramjas C.S.I. with whom he shared a close friendship and a long association. Din Dayalu also went to Jammu for the coronation of Maharaja Pratap Singh, who was much impressed by his lectures and promised him full support. Din Dayalu discussed his dream of creating an all India religious organisation and received assurance of complete assistance, financial and otherwise, from his patrons. He then undertook extensive touring of the United Provinces and Awadh where he met important people and used his impressive oratorical skills and contacts to set up *sabhas* in Lucknow, Kanpur, Bareilly, Muradabad, Shahjahanpur and Saharanpur.⁶

Within a year, Din Dayalu tried to give a more focussed institutional expression to his concerns. In 1886, he founded the Gau Varnashrama Hitaishini Ganga Dharma Sabha (The Religious Association for the Benefit of the Cow, *varna* Order, and the Holy Ganges) at Kankhal near Hardwar. This society published its rules, adopted an organisational structure and appointed *pracharaks*. A meeting of this Sabha was held on 12 October 1886 at the *haveli* of the Maharani of Landorah at Kankhal. The immediate issue that needed to be resolved related to the donation boxes placed along the banks of the Ganges by the Arya Samaj. The pilgrims' donations

were actually being utilized by the Arya Samaj to criticize and denounce the very sacred site and rituals that benefited them. Din Dayalu urged the priests of Hardwar to end this practice which by its very nature was self-destructive. He advised them to use this money instead for the protection of the cow and propagation and defence of the Sanatana Dharma. In this meeting Din Dayalu also stressed on the need for a greater unity among Hindus. However, the area of activity of this society remained limited to Hardwar and Kankhal which obliged Din Dayalu to think of setting up a religious organisation on a larger scale. In 1886, as the editor of the *Kohinoor*, he attended the second session of the Indian National Congress held at Calcutta. He wrote an Urdu pamphlet under the title 'Adalat-va-Azadi' (Court and Independence) in which he praised the Indian National Congress for attempting to politically unite Indians, but criticised it for ignoring Indian culture. He maintained that birth of true Nationalism and its protection was possible only by the preservation of Indian culture for which an all India religious organisation, chiefly concerned with religion and culture, should be set up. It was at the Calcutta session of the Congress that Din Dayalu met Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya for the first time. As they shared similar views, a lasting friendship between them was formed.⁷

II

To plan a new organisation for uniting Hindus of India a meeting was held in April 1887 in the princely state of Kapurthala. Named as the Bharat Dharma Mahamandal, this organisation began to take shape in a second meeting held at Hardwar in May to discuss further details regarding the convening of the Mahamandal. A reception committee was organized with Pandit Din Dayalu as its chairman. The first session of the Mahamandal was set for the occasion of *Ganga Dashmi* when Hardwar was filled with pilgrims. On its eve Din Dayalu issued a signed circular in Urdu, stating that the main objective of this conference was to unite all the Sanatan Dharm Sabhas of India. For this he made the following proposals:

- i. To deal only with matters related to religion.
- ii. To have uniform rules and principles for all the Dharm Sabhas
- iii. To set up a central office for facilitating correspondence between different *sabhas*.
- iv. To issue a monthly magazine to provide information regarding activities of all the *sabhas*.

- v. To hold this conference annually at an important sacred location, and each conference should take decisions regarding suggestions made in the previous conference.
- vi. To issue an annual report of the activities of the Mahamandal.

A questionnaire reflecting Din Dayalu's comprehensive concerns, embracing religion, society and culture of contemporary times, was attached to this circular.⁸ It documents the growing uneasiness of the orthodox Hindus over the criticisms of the traditional Hindu socio-religious beliefs and practices by the Christian missionaries and the radical Aryas.

The questionnaire first addressed itself to the sources of authority for Hindus. Pandit Din Dayalu believed that the scriptural authority of the Sanatana Dharma rested collectively in the *Vedas*, *Smritis* and the eighteen *Puranas*. He subscribed to the belief that the *Vedas* were revealed by God and that the *Brahmanas* and the *Upanishads* were part of the *Vedas*. Thereafter he inquired whether the *Brahmanas* were revealed or written by Rishis and which parts of the *Vedas* were revealed and which were not. Which were the oldest and latest *Smritis* and why did they differ in their views he wanted to know. He inquired if all of the eighteen *Puranas* were available in print and whether or not their authorship was certain. He also raised questions about certain contradictions in the history, geography and calendars of India. Din Dayalu's religious concerns extended to the nature of God and His worship. If Sagun worship was preferable over Nirguna, he asked for the supporting evidence. Personally, he believed that God did assume human form as incarnations and inquired whether or not the dignity of God was maintained in human form. Din Dayalu made queries regarding the number of incarnations and the differences between them. In this context he also brought up the objections raised by certain people with regard to Lord Krishna.

As may be expected *a priori*, Din Dayalu upheld the practice of idol worship and regarded it as the duty of all the four *varnas*. He however, inquired whether idol-worship existed at the beginning of creation or started in the later period. He maintained that gods should be worshipped in temples. The competence of the priest of the temple and the suitability of its building should be taken into account. He also wished to know how temples could be made useful to society and whether or not every temple should have a school attached to it. In the same vein, Din Dayalu, wanted to know in what ways can fairs at pilgrimage sites provide maximum spiritual and financial gain? He questioned the specific rationale of pilgrimages and asked who

was worthy of accepting charity at pilgrimage sites. He also wanted to know if any text explained the procedure of pilgrimage in detail. Another of Din Dayalu's concerns was whether the *shraddha* ceremony performed in his times conformed to the *Vedas*. Should the *shraddha* be performed at home or at a pilgrimage site and which category of Brahmans were authorized to perform *shraddhas*. He inquired if all the religious festivals were based on the *shastras* and were still celebrated by all Hindus. He expressed disapproval of the undesirable practices like gambling during Diwali and misbehaviour during Holi. Din Dayalu also took up a practical problem of his day when Hindus had to travel to foreign countries for service or betterment. He maintained that restricting them would be harmful to the community (*qaum*). He however felt that certain procedures and rules should be formulated to be followed while travelling and living in foreign lands and that on return, a Hindu should be allowed to repent through a process of purification. He therefore, wanted to know if such rules existed.

Din Dayalu attributed the numerous problems besetting the Hindu society of his day to the disjunction between the *varnaashrama* and the contemporary social reality. He inquired whether the basis of the *varna* order should be birth alone or deeds and *sanskars* should matter too. He also felt concerned about beliefs and the different practices emerging among Hindus belonging to the same *varna*. He wanted to know the reasons responsible for it and invited solutions to end this intra-*varna* disunity. Din Dayalu made certain queries relating to each *ashram*. He asked if the *bramacharis* actually existed in current times, and if they could be identified? How could the educated students of his day turned into *brahmacharis*? Din Dayalu was concerned equally with the functions of the *grihast ashram*. He wants to know with whose permission marriages should be performed, what should be the age of the bride and the groom, and whether a man can marry two women simultaneously. If yes, under what circumstances. He then inquired about the duties of *vanprasth ashram* and wanted to know which category of people in the present times could be included in this *ashram*. Finally, he looked for the *sanyasis* in his day and posed a question regarding their *varna* and age. He even expressed concern over the division of Sadhus in to different sects and asked whether or not they could be socially useful. Din Dayalu's wide ranging concerns also extended to the women. Whether or not a woman could have a Guru, and if yes, what were her duties towards him? Can she go on a pilgrimage without her husband and sons as escorts? If yes, then what means should be used to make sure that she did not

come to any harm? He maintained that the education of women should be such that enabled her to perform her duties better within the parameters of her household activities. He further asked if an educated woman had the same rights as a man. Was the second marriage of a women in conformity with the *shastras*. At the same time, Din Dayalu was deeply concerned about widow remarriage and inquired if the sympathy towards the widow was the same as the concern for the community. Moreover, if people were against widow remarriage, how could the number of widows be reduced, especially after the custom of *sati* had been out-lawed by the British.

Din Dayalu's cultural concerns, as evident from the questionnaire, were equally varied. These are reflected in his desire to know whether any books regarding the six systems of philosophy and the *Jyotish* and *Vaidak Shastras* were available. He wanted to know which of the texts of the six philosophical systems had been translated into Hindi and which ancient Sanskrit texts dealt with different sciences. Din Dayalu wanted to promote Sanskrit so that the *Vedas* could be read and followed. For this he underlined the need for setting up colleges of Sanskrit all over India and a central college at Hardwar. He was of the view that the education acquired in this college should lead to both worldly and spiritual progress. His next inquiry related to the ways in which these colleges can remove shortcomings in the education particularly of the priests at pilgrimage sites (*tirath purohits*) and of Brahmans in general. By what means could the Sanskritists earn respect and a daily living? Here he suggested that the Sanskritists should be given preferential treatment. Din Dayalu wanted to gradually introduce Hindi as the local language of North India. He felt that ancient Sanskrit texts and books in English should be translated into Hindi for the spread of knowledge. Din Dayalu maintained that Hindi should be introduced in the offices of the Dharam Sabhas all over India.⁹

III

Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma remained associated with the Bharat Dharam Mahamandal till 1902 when he resigned his position as secretary and withdrew from the Mahamandal. During this period of fifteen years (1887-1902), nine sessions of the Mahamandal were held, and Din Dayalu attended seven. His initial concerns as seen on the eve of the first session of the Mahamandal were reflected in the resolutions passed in its later sessions. These relate to the propagation of Sanatana Dharma based on the *Shruti*, *Smritis* and the *Puranas*, upholding the *varnashramadharma*, establishing unity

among different sects of the Hindus, setting up schools and libraries for the preservation and propagation of Sanskrit texts, and promotion of Hindi as the language of education and administration. In conformity with the decision taken to use Hindi for its proceedings, the Mahamandal issued the notice for the second session in Hindi. However, no resolution was passed by the Mahamandal to promote female education during this period. Similarly, there was no resolution regarding the purificatory rite for a Hindu returning from a foreign country. The notice signed by Din Dayalu for the second session of the Mahamandal extended invitation to the delegates of all the four *varnas* to attend the conference.¹⁰ For the first session he had invited only the first three *varnas*, leaving out the *shudras*. The shift is important because, by including the fourth *varna* he was opening the door to a large section of society as potential members of the Mahamandal. This could broaden the social base of the Hindu community as visualized by Din Dayalu. Certain resolutions passed by the Mahamandal reflected new directions, like condemnation of the use of dowry during marriages. The Mahamandal objected to government interference with Hindu customs through a bill on the Age of Consent.¹¹

Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma shared with the Arya Samaj the common framework of colonial government, with its socio-cultural milieu as well as its political and economic domination. Like the Arya Samaj, he chose to meet the challenge posed by the aggressive proselytizing activity of the Christian missionaries and the criticism of tradition by the radical Hindu reformist bodies like the Brahmo Samaj. The Arya Samaj rejected the Puranic scriptures, polytheism, idol worship, the role of Brahmans as mediators between man and God, the rituals like *shraddhas*, and the practice of pilgrimage. They held all these features responsible for the degeneration of Hinduism.¹² In opposition to the Arya Samaj, Din Dayalu Sharma upheld the sanctity of the *Puranas* as well as the *Vedas*, the *varnashrama* ideal, idol worship, and traditional rituals. There were three issues, however, on which Din Dayalu was in agreement with the Arya Samaj: cow protection, preservation of Sanskrit, and promotion of Hindi as the language of education and administration.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Benjamin Walker. *The Hindu World: An Encyclopaedic Survey of Hinduism*. Vol. 1 and 2. New York: 1968, pp. 345-46. Walker further says that Hindus generally refer to their religion, social customs and way of life as Sanatana Dharma, 'eternal law', implying that it has divine sanction and is perfect and unchangeable. Ibid, p. 347.

2. S. Radhakrishnan. *The Hindu View of Life*. London: Unwin Books, Sixteenth impression, 1971, pp. 56, 58. The word *dharma* is derived from the root *dhri*, which implies a set of rules of laws that sustain the cosmic order. J.D. Khatri. *Hindu Religion*. New Delhi: Sri Sanatan Dharm Sabha, A-Block, Janakpuri, 1981, p. 1.
3. Our main source for the early life of Din Dayalu is : Harihar Swaroop. *Pundit Din Dayalu Sharma: Samarak Granth*. New Delhi: Dev Publishing House, 1985, (henceforth cited as *Samarak Granth*), pp. 4-11.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-13.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-18.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-23.
8. The circular issued by Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma on the eve of the first session of the Bharat Dharma Mahamandala in 1887. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-30.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 45. 'In March 1891, both the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code were amended to raise the age of consent to 12 for married and unmarried girls; sexual intercourse with girls below that age was punishable with upto ten years in prison or transportation for life'. Janaki Nair. *Women and Law in Colonial India : A Social History*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996, p. 75.
12. For a systematic study on the Arya Samaj see : Kenneth W. Jones. *Arya Dharm : Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab*. California: University of California Press, 1976.